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(U) IR forwards Amembassy Memorandum of Conversation dated 790814, and which concerns current political issues; the Videla/Viola leadership style is revealed.

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Ricardo Yofre, Former Advisor to President Videla, Lawyer
Mr. Maxwell Chaplin, Deputy Chief of Mission, American Embassy, Buenos Aires
Mr. William H. Hallman, Political Counselor, American Embassy, Buenos Aires

DATE & PLACE: August 8, 1979; Chaplin Residence

INT/OPS Videla
1396 Viola
Leadership/Style

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

Yofre assured us that Ambassador Listre would return from Costa Rica to act as liaison between the government of Argentina and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights due to arrive here September 6. (Listre did not appear at the time Commission Executive Secretary Vargas Carreno visited Buenos Aires in late July to set up the Commission's visit. This led to Vargas Carreno's being received by Foreign Ministry tough-guy Juan Carlos Arlia, which set the visit off to a bad start. It was only rescued by the intervention of Foreign Minister Pastor.)

Yofre described at some length the strong opposition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when President Videla first ordered the Ministry to accept the visit of the Inter-American Commission. Juan Carlos Arlia fumed when he heard that the Commission would be allowed more than just a visit to Argentina to study the legal aspects of the human rights situation here and he, along with his boss, Admiral Montes, accused the Presidency of traitorous behavior. Yofre recalled that when the actual terms of reference for the visit were worked out with the Commission this had to be done by Colonel Cerda from the President's office -- without informing the Foreign Affairs Ministry. A suggested letter drafted at the Ministry accepting the visit's terms sought again to limit the Commission to a legal look-see, so that the entire letter had to be redrafted at the Presidency before being sent.

Civilian-Military Politics

Not surprisingly Yofre said that military governments are unable to function without a strong tie with a civilian political group or groups to feed the "militares" and guide them through the pitfalls of civilian-style politics.

Frequently it is the role of the small splinter parties to provide this service -- one of the few times these parties can "do their thing" and flourish. Yofre went on to mention also civilian personalities and cliques, rather than parties, that played roles in military governments: Mor Roig was a mainstay of the Lanusse administration, for example; and Yofre mentioned a civilian group now circulating around General Diaz Bessone and his "Year 2000

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Foundation" as being one that stood beside General Ongania during his presidency.

One of the big problems with the present Videla government, consequence and cause of its "degaste," is the fact that it now lacks this kind of civilian participation and a plan to get back to civilian rule.

Yofre attributed this to the fact that under the system adopted in March of 1976 both the Air Force and the Navy has 33-1/3% of the official power apportionment. This has succeeded in interrupting political progress that might have been made if Videla and company had been able to choose their civilians freely. Yofre mentioned, for example, that it was Videla's wish to have a really distinguished cabinet and that he would have named prominent and effective people last November had it it not been for military politics which "within 48 hours" completely wrecked the President's plans and forced him to put military unity ahead of political progress. Yofre asked rhetorically whether one could imagine a less distinguished group than members of the present cabinet -- with the obvious exception of Minister of Economy Martinez de Hoz.

This stalemate means that General Videla's present civilian advisor, Francisco Moyano, can do virtually nothing. This will be true "until the military problem is resolved." Yofre described the political lieutenants of Viola as outstanding men and good army officers, but lacking the political touch. He described the efforts of the four colonels (I believe they are Arevalo, Aguilar, Pino and Macchuchino) as resembling the steps an elephant might make in a forest. "Clearly these army men are incapable of making a political plan."

Yofre described as disadvantageous the personal style of General Videla which seeks consensus rather than amasses power. He went on to opine that this was even more the style of General Viola, and he believes that when General Viola takes over the country's leadership its political crisis will continue insofar as General Viola is unable to make new power arrangements.

Changes That Never Took Place

Mr. Chaplin reminded Mr. Yofre that about one year ago Yofre was predicting the imminent departure from the scene of Minister of Economy Martinez de Hoz and of Ambassador to Washington Aja Espil.

Yofre responded that, as for Martinez de Hoz, it would have been impossible to fire the one person in the cabinet who appeared to have a firm policy and an operating team. This could only have been done in connection with the kind of "Great Cabinet" that Videla might have had in mind but could not bring into existence because of military opposition. Yofre also said that

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to fire Martinez de Hoz as part of a "Cabinet massacre" would have been the same kind of mistake Ongania made when he disbanded his cabinet and allowed Minister of Economy Krieger Vasena to depart for good. (COMMENT: Krieger Vasena's pragmatic economic policies are often compared with those of Martinez de Hoz.)

As for the firing of Ambassador Aja Espil, Yofre pointed to a lack of consensus regarding any possible alternatives among the military and also the fact that people who might have been acceptable were unwilling to take the job because of the short time in office left to this government. (COMMENT: This sounds a bit hollow. Anyone approached last September or October to replace Aja Espil in Washington, would, according to the rules of that day, have been able to count on at least 18 months of a Videla government -- not, it would seem, a particularly daunting prospect as Argentine governments go.) Videla asked Martinez de Hoz to suggest candidates, and the Minister came up with three names, including Carlos Dietl and Raúl Lanusse. Neither candidate, however was acceptable to all members of the Junta -- Yofre believed precisely because they were known to have been suggested by Martinez de Hoz. Martinez de Hoz came up also with the name of the Central Bank's deputy director Cristian Zimmermann. Zimmermann also proved unacceptable.

Former Ambassadors: Old But Interesting Insights

Mr. Chaplin asked why Arnaldo Musich had lasted such a short time in Washington. Appointed by the new military team after it took office in March 1976, Musich only stayed in Washington only 40 to 50 days before quitting his job and returning permanently to Argentina. Yofre believes that the basic problem was that Musich was a presidential appointment -- made at the behest of Martinez de Hoz -- who went against the grain of Admiral Guzzetti, at that time Foreign Minister. A result of Guzzetti's opposition to Musich was that the ambassador's frequent request for changes or augmentations of personnel went unanswered. Musich was apparently unwise also to transmit to his government requests coming out of Washington for explanations in the cases of human rights violations, and to expect an answer back. Finally Musich came home and complained to the Foreign Minister and then to the President as Hidalgo Sola had done shortly before. Admiral Guzzetti dug in his heels and told the President that it was "him or Musich." Under the circumstances the Pesident had to agree to Musich's going.

The other case we discussed was that of Ambassador to Venezuela Hidalgo Sola, who was disappeared -- apparently by (someone's) security forces -- from a busy downtown street in Buenos Aires when he returned here for the wedding of one of his children in early July of 1977. Hidalgo Sola, a former Radical Party member, was also a Videla appointee opposed by Admiral Guzzetti from the beginning.

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After arriving in Caracas in 1976 Hidalgo Sola received a request from Casildo Herreras -- the Peronist leader of the Confederación General de Trabajo, at that moment on the lam from Argentina and a bete noire of the new military government -- for an interview. Somehow Casildo Herreras managed to convince Hidalgo Sola that a genuine emergency was involved and Hidalgo Sola saw him -- explaing later to his government what he had done. When called on the carpet by Guzzetti, the ambassador went over Guzzetti's head and presented his problems to President Videla -- who confirmed Hidalgo Sola in office to Guzzetti's dismay.

(COMMENT: This account differs from an account we heard earlier that Hidalgo Sola probably was disappeared by some powerful person's group for having received former Senator Solari Yrigoyen, when the senator was forced loose from captivity -- apparently by the Navy -- at the insistence of President Videla and allowed to leave the country. According to Yofre, Hidalgo Sola and Solari Yrigoyen were in opposite camps of the Radical Party, and the Argentine ambassador to Caracas would have had no reason to risk his position by seeing the recently freed former senator. Solari Yrigoyen did, however, stop first in Venezuela en route to the United States.)

Events At First Corps

In discussing the human rights violation situation Yofre mentioned that when Generals Galtieri and Villareal had taken over as First Corps Commander he had found a mare's nest of insubordination and problems insofar as straightening out the human rights violations situation was concerned. (COMMENT: We had heard earlier that Galtieri had begun to criticize his predecessor for Suarez Mason's alleged infractions of military rule, careless ways, etc. These were, however, purely military complaints and we had not heard that Galtieri was beginning to criticize Suarez Mason's human rights record within his army circles.) As an example of the problems inherited by the new commander, Yofre mentioned the disappearance of six young people in May, which he said was not pulled off by the army, and had caused a real battle within the military. He expressed concern that IAHRC would either be used by opponents of the GOA or on its own would make harshly critical statements which would be used by the political opponents of Videla and Viola in the military politics of presidential succession. He enumerated the number of hardliners who had been retired last year, and said a number remained who must go this year if the moderates are to prevail. While he hoped for a Viola succession (which would take place at the end of 1979), it was not a certainty, nor was the political complexion of the officers who would accompany the new president. In any event, 1980 would be a "military" as distinct from a "political" year because the armed forces had not agreed on a plan to move toward civilian government.

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When asked how Videla had been able to engineer the visit of the IAHRC despite so much military opposition, Yofre said it was not Videla alone, had had the generals behind him, somehow. He implied he did not know all the ins and outs of how this had been arranged. He said there were enough people among the military who realized they simply had to put the past behind them and move on to a new and civilized future. (In another context he spoke of the military and the civilian politicians, including Permanent Assembly member Allende, being in agreement on the need for a "Ley de Olvido.")

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